

## THE IRREPRESSIBLE HERR SCHACHT

### *Hitler's Adviser Stages a Comeback*

ALFRED WERNER

**W**HEN Wilhelm Schacht, German newspaperman, gave his newly born son Hjalmar the middle names "Horace Greeley," it is possible that he was aware of the noble statement once made by the founder of the *New York Tribune*: "If, on a full and final review, my life and practice shall be found unworthy of my principles, let due infamy be heaped on my memory."

Dr. Hjalmar Horace Greeley Schacht was in his late sixties when, charged with being a major war criminal, he faced the judges of the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg. He had served Hitler as a member of the Reichstag, Reichsminister of Economics, Plenipotentiary for War Economy, President of the Reichsbank, and Reichsminister without Portfolio; yet he had been perspicacious enough to prefabricate an alibi by dabbling with anti-Nazi tendencies. And when the judges at Nuremberg reluctantly acquitted him, they fulfilled a prediction that had been made in verses published in the satirical magazine *Simplizissimus* as early as 1931:

ONLY the other day a high official of the American Military Government in Germany announced that there no longer exists any reason why Hjalmar Schacht, Hitler's minister of finance, should not be appointed an official of the West German government. Freed of all taint, Schacht is now actively engaged in a campaign to re-establish himself in German politics; his recently published autobiography "explaining" his political twists and turns is a best-seller in Germany and may soon be published here. ALFRED WERNER examines this autobiography for what it reveals of Schacht's character and of the tendencies of German politics in general. Mr. Werner, who has been a frequent contributor to *COMMENTARY*, was born in Vienna in 1911 and holds a doctorate from the University of Vienna.

*And when we go to war at last,  
Just fight and die—you duffer!  
For win or lose, the war once past,  
Be sure Herr Schacht won't suffer! . . .*

*When beaten, sore, with crumbling walls,  
The wretched Germans flee,  
Behind it all, behind it all  
Herr Schacht will hide—you'll see!\**

Most of the Nazi bigwigs who shared the dock with Schacht in Nuremberg are now either dead or in jail, but the man who liked to refer to himself as the "Economic Napoleon of the 20th Century" now lives undisturbed with his second wife near Hamburg in the British zone, unrepentant, self-assured, and righteously indignant as ever. He seems not in the least afraid of the Goddess of Justice! When in 1947, after his Nuremberg acquittal, a German de-Nazification court sentenced Schacht to eight years of forced labor, the decision was quashed by the Court of Appeals at Ludwigsburg, Wuerttemberg, in the American zone. However, the Minister of de-Nazification of Wuerttemberg-Baden overruled the appeals court and ordered a new trial for January 31, 1949. The scene was ready for the trial, but the defendant was absent. A new date was set and the President-Justice warned Schacht that he would be tried *in absentia* should he fail to appear. On the appointed day, Schacht did not appear and instead sent a letter claiming that the entire trial was illegal. Thereupon the court rejected the appeal it had previously granted Schacht.

The "Economic Wizard" should be in jail again by now, but it is questionable whether the Hamburg authorities, who twice failed

\* Translation quoted from *Final Judgment*, by Victor H. Bernstein, 1947.



to force him to go to Ludwigsburg, will ever deliver him to his jailers.

Recently Dr. Schacht had to cancel a lecture, to be held before the members of the Rhein-Ruhr Club—an organization of industrialists—in a town in Westphalia, because the Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund (German Labor Unions) threatened that, if Schacht spoke, ten thousand workers would strike in the Ruhr area.

The textiles firm, Yarur, in Chile, has asked Schacht to become its financial and commercial adviser. The Yarurs are Christian Arabs who belong to the wealthiest and most influential families in Chile. It remains to be seen whether the Allies will permit Schacht to emigrate to Chile. If he should go to Chile, he could be of enormous aid to the large German minority which is pro-Nazi.

As early as the summer of 1945, when he still was a Nuremberg defendant, Schacht had, at the request of American Major C. J. Hynning, worked out several reports giving his "expert's opinion" on the economic future of Germany. About two years later, as a free man, he started writing articles for the *Weltwoche*, a widely known Zurich weekly that once flirted with Nazism, advising the Western world on how to manage its destiny. At present the indefatigable old man is on the editorial staff of the *Welt*, a leading newspaper in the British zone, making thinly concealed demands for colonies for Germany. He does not mind giving interviews, and to a correspondent of *Newsweek*, who found him as confident and healthy as ever, he confided his wish to lecture in the United States again as he did in 1930 when he pleaded that Germany could not pay its First World War debts. Above all, he has restored his financial position by becoming the author of a best-seller, *Abrechnung mit Hitler* (Rowohlt), which is freely circulated all over Trizonia.

"**R**UTHLESS attack is evidence of right!" the late Hitler once proclaimed, and anyone who expects Schacht's *Abrechnung* to be a meek "Apologia Pro Vita Sua" will be deep-

ly disappointed. Throughout his eighty-five-thousand-word opus the author poses as a "non-political" expert concerned with the welfare, not of any single party, but of the German fatherland. He is rather strangely silent about the fact that, together with Walther Rathenau, he, the "non-political," was a founding member of the German Democratic party and that for years he, the "Aryan liberal," was the darling and hope of the pro-republican forces who got him the position of Reichsbank president. He brazenly declares, on the other hand, that he was never a member of the Nazi party. Actually he was an *Ehrenmitglied*, or honorary member, paying dues amounting to one thousand Reichsmark per month. Not a single word about his quarrels with the Nazis in the mid-20's when they "accused" him of being a Budapest Jew by the name of Hajum Schacht! And to find out about some of the dirty financial deals in which he was involved as a banker one has, of course, to consult other sources. . . .\*

Schacht's opus appeared as one in a series of novels (!) that includes fiction by Joseph Conrad, Ernest Hemingway, André Gide, and Ignazio Silone, as well as such German anti-fascists as Erich Kaestner, Theodor Plivier, and Kurt Tucholsky. Ironically, the title of Schacht's book, *Settling Accounts with Hitler*, is reminiscent of the one the Fuehrer first gave to his autobiography: he called it *Eine Abrechnung*, and this eventually became the subtitle of *Mein Kampf*, volume one.

Anti-fascist Germans rebuked the publisher, Ernst Rowohlt, for permitting Schacht to publish his concoction and receive a fat check for it, while the career of minor Nazi scribblers has been stopped by *Druckverbot*. (The first three hundred thousand copies of *Abrechnung* sold out in a few weeks.) Rowohlt, who has moved his headquarters from Berlin to Stuttgart, quickly dissociated himself and his firm from Schacht's ideology, but older Germans remember that during the Weimar Republic he had, rather nonchalantly, published both leftist and Nazi writers. . . .

\* See, in particular, *Schacht: Hitler's Magician*, by Norbert Muhlen (1939).



TOGETHER with the industrialist Fritz Thyssen, Schacht met Hitler and Goering for the first time in December 1930; he tells how he found them intelligent and modest, and saw nothing in Hitler's statements "*was uns irgendwie haette befremden koennen*" ("which might in any way have shocked us"). Hitler's program, he asserts, was "*das Festhalten an Religion, Eigentum, Privatinitiative und die Betonung des Persoenlichkeitswertes*" ("adherence to religion, private property, private enterprise, and emphasis on the value of personality").

Schacht still finds no stronger words with which to castigate the Nazi party's program than to say that it was a little "*ueberspitzt*" ("overdone") as far as its anti-Semitism was concerned. He claims to have been relieved upon learning that German Jews were to be given "the same legal status as foreigners," and was displeased to find out, later on, that, unlike other "foreigners" (for instance, Italian and Japanese businessmen in Berlin), they were deported to Auschwitz. And he insists that the exterminations "followed neither from the party program nor from other [Nazi] manifestations," and that, in fact, "such contempt of the law was directly at issue with the party program."

But even today this opportunist favors a sort of "moderate" anti-Semitism. Posing as a sincere friend to the Jews, he holds that in a "Christian state" it is "a mistake for Jews to be so keen in hankering after key cultural positions." (His frequent references to Christianity seem to be a bow to the leading German conservative party of today, the Christian Democrats.) To show that even Jews were, at first, in favor of Hitlerism, Schacht quotes from a statement issued in 1934 by the Verband Nationaldeutscher Juden, which, after Hindenburg's death, endorsed Hitler's "election" to the office of Reichspraesident—as though this tiny group of misguided fanatics, burdened with Jewish self-hatred, was representative of German Jewry. To shine as a genuine humanist, a lover of mankind, Schacht even counterattacks by assailing the Jews' "racialism," as it manifested itself in the idea of the "Chosen People," and in Ezra's prohibition of mixed marriages, but

this humanism of his did not move him to any protest against the pogroms of November 1938.

Undoubtedly, Schacht looked down on Hitler and the uncouth self-made men around him. But though he was disgusted with the "*Byzantinismus*" (the servility) of Hitler's guests, and the "off-color stories and bacchanalia" typical of the Nazis' social gatherings, he attended them nevertheless. He may have favored the assassination of the Fuehrer (provided he had nothing to do with it), but unlike Otto Strasser, Roehm, Stennes, and other dissidents, he never risked an open break. When, in the summer of 1940, Hitler returned to Berlin after signing the Compiègne Armistice, Schacht was the first to congratulate him on his victory.

"His [Schacht's] judgment is always affected by his boundless personal ambition and his unreliable character. I believe if Hitler knew how to handle him properly Schacht would even now put himself at his disposal, unless he has given up the ship for lost." Thus wrote, as late as September 1941, Ulrich von Hassell, the elderly diplomat who was to pay with his life for his participation in the abortive July 1944 plot against Hitler (*The Von Hassell Diaries*, 1947).

VIRTUALLY all surviving anti-Nazi plotters deny Schacht's claim to have been prominent in the attempt to remove the Fuehrer; the sole exception is Hans Bernd Gisevius, who worked simultaneously for the Gestapo and the American OSS (*To the Bitter End*, 1947). Rudolf Pechel, an anti-Nazi editor who was arrested by the Gestapo, says that Schacht cautiously limited himself to occasional cynical jokes about Hitlerism and a few conversations with underground leaders (*Deutscher Widerstand*, 1947). Hans Rothfels, a former professor at Koenigsberg, asserts that the anti-Nazis did not trust Schacht: "A marked record of ambition, vanity, and opportunism prevented his being admitted to full partnership. Like Gisevius, who seems to have been the one nearest to Schacht, he was kept at arm's length by the leaders of the conspiracy." (*The German Opposition to Hitler*, 1948.)



True, Schacht would have loved to take the place of Hitler. Von Hassell wrote in May 1944 that Schacht thought of himself as "the man of the hour." Yet he did not wish to commit himself one way or another. Astonishingly, he now devotes a long section of the book to his anti-Nazi activities. According to Schacht, the *coup* he planned (or claims to have planned) with General von Witzleben in September 1938 was the only competently organized attempt of its kind. If it failed, the responsibility must be shared by Chamberlain and Daladier, the Wehrmacht, the German churches, the liberal bourgeoisie, and the workers alike. As for the conspiracy of July 1944,\* Schacht has no use for it at all.

After Colonel Stauffenberg had smuggled into Hitler's headquarters the bomb which almost killed him, the Gestapo in a panic arrested everyone who might have had the remotest connections with the conspirators. Schacht was arrested, too, on July 23, 1944, and spent eight months in a Gestapo prison and was kept thereafter in the Ravensbrück, Flossenbürg, and Dachau concentration camps. For the first time the old man experienced on his own body what the victims of Nazism were made to suffer; yet even in the concentration camps he received special treatment, and at Dachau he was able to visit the Schuschnigg and listen to their radio. Eventually he was liberated in Southern Tyrol, together with other prominent prisoners, by American troops; but he was shocked when, instead of releasing him at once, the Americans kept him imprisoned and finally sent him to Nuremberg. He thus analyzes this enormous error:

"From the fall of 1939 onward I had constantly risked my life fighting Hitler. I, who had all the time fought against the war with

all means, was now termed a war criminal. Gradually I realized what enormous intellectual and moral confusion the Hitler system and the war, precipitated by Hitler, had wrought in the minds of all mankind. Anyone who had worked under Hitler was persecuted, even if he had fought Hitler from within, like myself."

AS FOR developments since V-E Day, Schacht sees the "guilty men" as those British and American theorists who failed to appreciate that monarchist traditionalism is "innate" to the German people (this is the founder of the erstwhile anti-monarchist German Democratic party talking). Instead, they uttered a lot of nonsense about democracy to people who were hungry, cold, and without houses because the Allies would not realize that Germany must be given a chance to live: "We shall never allow the Allies to rob us of our conviction that our sacrifices had a meaning and a significance." But "us" and "our" apparently does not refer to all postwar Germans; Schacht seems to loathe, for instance, "the old labor leaders who, under the protection of the occupying powers, try to recapture their former positions." At the same time, in 1948, he still finds praise for the "enthusiastic, buoyant, and responsible elements who endeavored to steer the National Socialist *Tatwelle* [literally: wave of action] towards the fine sincere goal of social justice."

A man of many talents, Schacht has recently disclosed that at Nuremberg he wrote an operetta about the love of an American soldier for a *Fräulein*. Should he fail in his bid for German leadership, he may still make headlines as a producer of romantic idylls for the German stage. In the meantime, he is getting royalties from his autobiography, which at this moment is also making the rounds of American publishers' offices.

\* See "The Junker Plot to Kill Hitler," by Alfred Werner, COMMENTARY, July 1947.